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JEAN-GEORGES

THE WORLD FAMOUS CHEF DISHES ON
THE INN AT POUND RIDGE & LIFE IN WESTCHESTER

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BACK TO BASICS WITH Jean-Georges

The internationally acclaimed chef and restaurateur's newest venture, The Inn at Pound Ridge, was a two-year labor of love close to his heart — and home. He lives in nearby Waccabuc, NY, with his wife, daughter and a garden where he “can get back to my roots.”

BY KRISTAN ZIMMER PHOTOGRAPHS BY CONOR DOHERTY

The Inn at Pound Ridge
which opened in January
features locally sourced
French cuisine inspired by
Vongerichten's family recipes



SOFT SPOKEN AND FORTHCOMING, Jean-Georges Vongerichten, a 14-time restaurant owner, savvy businessman and culinary visionary, is also a family man. He raves about his wife Marja's fried rice and chicken stew. Married 10 years, he still enjoys cooking with Marja, an expert Korean chef. On summer weekends you'll find him swimming in the lake or tending to his vegetable garden at his country home in Waccabuc, a small hamlet in Lewisboro, NY, where he and his daughter Chloe, 13, a budding horsewoman, grow tomatoes, cucumbers and fresh herbs. He talks to *Serendipity* about his latest restaurant endeavor, and his family life in Northern Westchester.

What was the inspiration behind The Inn at Pound Ridge?

It's a piece of history that we took over. It took about two years to refurbish — it was a labor of love. The building is quite old — early 1800s. The stones and fireplace were there. The footprint of the building was there. It's keeping the DNA of the time, but bringing in some modern elements. We used reclaimed wood from upstate New York, but Danish chairs from the 1950s. We wanted to remake an old place with modern touches.

How would you describe the vibe of the place?

We want people to be comfortable there; that's why we dress

the waiters in sneakers and jeans. They feel comfortable working there, and I think that makes a difference in the service. And it's farm-to-table, but I really wanted to make it local. We make our own ricotta, our own yogurt. I use a lot of farm-to-table in the city, but this is as close as you can get to the farm. It's the difference between cooking in the city and cooking in the country — we started tapping the trees earlier this spring to make our own maple syrup to serve at brunch.

We hear you serve brunch seven days a week. It's our favorite meal! Tell us more about the menu.

In my country, brunch is every day — seven days a week [like-wise at the Inn, from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.]. Of course, we are French so [at the Inn] we will serve waffles, pancakes and eggs Benedict ... mushroom pizza with fried egg on top, chopped salads, roast chicken with licorice and rosemary, baked salmon, lobster if you want, sticky buns, handmade scones and croissants. We will have healthy items for brunch [too] — a lot of juices and smoothies. Everything is changing very rapidly with the season. In early June, we'll have cherries and peaches. We're always going to have different berries, different fruits. And we'll have lots of eggs from the local farmers, including Martha Stewart. She sends 100 eggs to the Inn every day for brunch [from her farm in Bedford].

The Inn at Pound Ridge interior is a blend of farmhouse and modern styles, with a focus on comfort.



GO THERE:

The Inn at Pound Ridge
258 Westchester Ave.,
Pound Ridge, NY, 914-764-1400,
theinnatpoundridge.com



IT'S JEAN-GEORGES' FAVORITE!

Mixed Wild Mushroom Pizza with Fried Eggs

Makes 4 individual pizzas

- 2 garlic cloves, finely minced
- Semolina flour
- Pizza dough, divided into 4 balls (see recipe)
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
- 12 ounces fontina, diced (2¼ cups)
- 12 ounces fresh ricotta (1½ cups)
- 4 cups mix of thinly sliced fresh wild mushrooms, such as oyster, king oyster, shiitake, cremini, enoki and chanterelle
- ¼ cup thinly sliced fresh morels
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 4 large eggs

1. Put a pizza stone or baking sheet on the lowest oven rack. Preheat the oven to 500°F. Let the stone get very, very hot.
2. In a small bowl, combine the oil and garlic.
3. Sprinkle a baking sheet with semolina flour. Pick up a dough ball with your fingers and gently pinch the edges of the ball while rotating it so that the dough stretches into a round. Drape the round over your knuckles, and continue turning and stretching until the center is so thin it is

almost translucent. The dough should be about 9 inches in diameter. Gently place on the prepared sheet. Unless you have a very large pizza stone or baking sheet, you can probably make only 1 or 2 pizzas at a time. Cover the other dough rounds with plastic wrap until ready to use.

4. Spread a quarter of the Parmesan and fontina on the dough round, then crumble a quarter of the ricotta over the top. Scatter a quarter of the mushrooms over the cheese. Drizzle a quarter of the garlic oil all over the pizza and season with salt. Slide the sheet onto the hot stone and bake until the crust is browned and crisp, the cheese is melted, and the mushrooms are tender, about 15 minutes.

5. While the pizza bakes, heat a little oil in a small nonstick skillet over medium heat. Crack 1 egg into the skillet, lightly season with salt and pepper. Cook, sunny side up, until the white is set and the yoke is runny.

6. Grind pepper all over the pizza and carefully slide the sunny side up egg onto the finished pie. Repeat with the remaining ingredients, serving each pizza hot as it comes out of the oven.

PIZZA DOUGH

- 3¾ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for shaping
- 1 teaspoon active dry yeast
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- Extra-virgin olive oil

1. Combine the flour, yeast, salt and sugar in a mixer fitted with the dough hook. Mix until just blended, then add 1½ cups warm water. Mix until the dough comes together, then mix for another minute.

2. Lightly oil a large bowl. Transfer the dough to the bowl, lightly oil the top of the dough and cover the bowl tightly with plastic wrap. Let rise in a warm spot for 8 hours or until the risen dough is marshmallowy.

3. On a lightly floured surface, use a bench scraper or sharp knife to divide the dough into quarters. With lightly floured hands, shape the pieces into balls by cupping the dough and turning it against the floured surface until round and tight.

4. Transfer the balls to a lightly oiled baking sheet or bowls, then lightly brush the tops with oil. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let rise in a warm spot until tripled in volume, about 1.5 hours. Use immediately or put a sheet of parchment on top of the dough balls, then cover tight with plastic wrap.

5. Refrigerate for up to two days. When ready to use, remove from the refrigerator and let stand in a warm place for 1 hour.

Local baby beets
with yogurt, balsamic
vinegar and herbs



Will patrons be able to dine outdoors?

We have a terrace outside, downstairs. We have room for a dozen tables. We have to be respectful to the neighborhood so we will shut it down around 10 p.m. at night. But all the windows at the Inn will be open for the summer, so even if you sit inside you will feel like you're sitting outdoors.

What can we look forward to at the restaurant this summer?

Morel mushrooms, artichokes, dandelions, wild edible herbs, fiddleheads, pickled ramps and a lot of greens. Whatever comes out of the ground. And we work with a lot of foraged things.

SPEED ROUND

Favorite meal: Brunch. I love eggs — asparagus frittata and eggs Benedict with smoke salmon from upstate New York.

Favorite chef: In Westchester, it's Chef Dan Barber at Blue Hill at Stone Barns — his mission is to be local and eat what you grow.

Favorite kitchen tool: A microplane for zesting citrus, ginger, radish and Parmesan. It's a tool I use every day.

Three things every chef needs: A sharp knife, a good series of pots and pans, and great olive oil.

Favorite dishes your wife makes: Her fried rice, her chicken stew with chili flakes and coriander and her mungbean pancakes. I like her Korean food and she likes my French food. I guess we like each other.

Most underrated ingredient: The potato. Shapes, mashed — you can do so much.

What do you love about your country home in Waccabuc?

The house is an hour and 15 minutes away from our place in the West Village on the West Side in Manhattan. It's beautiful country. My daughter, Chloe, loves horseback riding. The attraction was the proximity to the city. I grew up in the country, so I missed it. They say when you get older you go back to your roots. I'm going back to my roots. We have a garden, and I want my grandchildren to experience it, as well. It's so close and so beautiful up there. You can really use it four seasons. We go swimming in the lake. The whole attraction of Westchester is spectacular.

What initially attracted you to your house?

My wife found it. It was the first house she looked at. We looked at more, but came back to it and fell in love with it. A funny story — the Sunday we visited our house, the real estate agent showed me the Inn first. She was with Ginnel Real Estate. She drove to the Inn and said, "This is the place for you," thinking we were looking for a restaurant space. I said, "You don't understand, I am looking for a house, not a restaurant." So the first place I saw in the country was the Inn. Three years ago, the Tropin family approached me and said, "We want you to run this place." I said, "I'm not sure. It's too close to where I relax." They said, "We will invest the money and build it for you." I went to the place and fell in love with the downstairs and the history of the Inn. We shook hands and made it happen. I love the results. It's amazing.

Where do you like to go out to eat?

We have some great places — North Star in Pound Ridge, Moderne Barn in Armonk and The Bedford Post Inn in Bedford, which Michael White has taken over. I love 121 Restaurant in North Salem — I think that is a fun place to go for a bite. And, of course, Blue Hill at Stone Barns in Pocantico Hills. It is one of my favorite restaurants in the country.

You've said you cook a lot with your wife, Marja, and family on the weekends. What is your favorite thing to make?

My favorite things to cook on the weekends, and at the Inn, are pizza and dishes to share. I like putting things in one pot — a stew in the middle of the table — and having people serve themselves. It's how I grew up. It's the modern way for everybody to be on their phone or device more than looking each other in the eye. We continue the tradition of family at home. No cell phones. When you do a one-pot meal you look at each other more. We do it at the restaurant, too. People come to the restaurant to socialize.

How do you approach each meal you create?

Every dish I put together I experiment and try to add something new. As it cooks, you find you are missing this and that. My dishes always evolve. I create a lot of them at home, then I put them on the menu. When I cook at home for six, 10, 12 people, it's easier to try things. I use my home as experimental ground. It's exciting to cook at home and to see people's reactions and what they think. A lot of dishes I don't master, but I'm trying to see what I like, and if people eat it, it's good. It's fun.



"Every dish I put together I try to add something new, experiment with something else," says Vongerichten, shown in the kitchen of the Inn at Pound Ridge.